

February 10, 2009

Senator Stan Rosenberg  
Hampshire and Franklin District  
Room 320  
Massachusetts Senate  
State House  
Boston, MA 02133-1053

Dear Senator Rosenberg,

We eagerly await the report of your Special Commission on Municipal Relief, and we very much appreciate your attention to our detailed letter of December 22, 2008.

In the meantime, we are responding to Governor Patrick's exhortation to the MMA on Friday, January 23, 2009 to support his legislative package, "Municipal Relief II." We see the following elements as especially beneficial to our community:

1. Eliminating the tax exemption on poles, underground conduits, wires and pipes of telecommunications companies laid in or erected upon public or private ways and property (including cable television, internet service, telephone service, and data service providers)
2. Increasing the state's meals tax by 1%, from 5% to 6%, returning this revenue to the communities
3. Increasing the state's hotel tax by 1%, from 5% to 6%, returning this 1% to the communities
4. Allowing 1% increase in the local option hotel tax, from 4% to 5%, retaining this revenue in the community as currently done. Passing this legislation very quickly would allow us to call a special Town Meeting in time for this to take effect with the calendar quarter beginning July 1, 2009 (per MGL Chapter 64G: Section 3A), rather than delaying the effect until the calendar quarter beginning October 1, 2009 – which is the beginning of the hotel slow season that extends through the first quarter of 2010.
5. Allowing 1% local option meals tax, retaining this revenue in the community as is currently done with the local option hotel tax
6. Eliminating the 5% sales tax exemption on alcohol, candy, and sweetened beverages, dedicating this revenue to public health programs that partner with locally-identified community needs in the areas of alcohol and tobacco addiction services, health promotion, school-based health programs, teenage pregnancy prevention, domestic violence and sexual assault prevention, work force expansion services and other critical wellness programs

7. Expanding the 5-cent recycle deposit to include plain and flavored water, coffee-based drinks, juices, and sports drinks
8. Increasing the RMV fees for individually owned vehicles while decreasing it for ambulances and buses, dedicating this revenue to transportation improvements that go beyond focusing on increased private passenger automobile circulation
9. Increasing use of the Internet to improve cost-effectiveness and efficiency in procurement and advertising
10. Increasing flexibility in both Municipal and Regional School District Borrowing
11. Empowering cities and towns to modernize their health insurance plans outside of collective bargaining would simply give local officials the same power the state has to update health plans – power that has contributed to the GIC plan's cost effectiveness. Giving municipalities this same authority would save more money, more quickly, and more efficiently than any other option currently proposed, including pushing communities into joining the GIC, which simply does not save every community money. If allowing municipalities “plan design” remains politically impossible, decreasing the GIC adoption threshold from 70% to 50% of union representation and requiring provision of “GIC Comparable Health Insurance” would be preferable to the status quo.

Thank you for your creative and persistent efforts to bring relief to the communities of our Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

Stephanie J. O’Keeffe  
Chair, Amherst Select Board

(separate letters to local Rep Ellen Story,  
and House Speaker DeLeo,  
and Senate President Murray,  
plus committee chairs when they are named,  
which they weren't as of Friday morning 2/6/09:-(